ASCHENBRÖDEL

A CHILD SKETCH

BY

MRS. GEORGE A. PAULL

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LISBETH AND GRANTHER.

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A CHILD SKETCH

BY

MRS. GEORGE A. PAULL

AUTHOR OF "MOTHER'S BEDTIME TALES," "PRINCE DIMPLE" ETC.

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ASCHENBRODEL.

CHAPTER I.

It was a morning in early spring; one of those April mornings when every one whose sensibilities are neither dormant nor callous feels the jubilant new life of the year dancing through the veins, keeping time with the symphony of nature.

It was a day of infinite suggestion, and thus far more charming than a summer day of full development. The bare brown limbs of the trees no longer made sharp arabesques against the sky; there was a soft, indefinable purplish haze about them

that told the story of awakening life in the leaf-buds. In the distance the mountains were softened in outline, instead of breaking the sky-line abruptly; and lifting up one's eyes to the hills, one knew that the artist brush of Nature had begun to lay the ground color on her canvas, and that presently every shade of foliage upon her palette would be laid on; not recklessly, but with a delicacy, an exquisiteness of conception and execution that defied imitation.

Just beyond the range of human hearing was the soft prelude of the spring: green things whispering to one another as they met in the sunlight; a tender *allegro* in the branches of the trees as the sap danced upward and swelled their hearts with possibilities of blossom and leaf and harvest, and a grand *maesto* from all of

Nature's voices, as they joined in the chorus of resurrection joy.

There was another symphony that came within mortal range, and which, though prosaic enough, was nevertheless in accord with the spring morning: the patter of children's feet as they went on their way to school, loitering somewhat as the sunshine of the April morning whispered to them to stop and revel in it, instead of poring over their lesson-books; the sound of their happy voices and merry bursts of laughter, as care-free and joyous as the songs of the birds that were darting about, making their preparations for nesting; the distant, discordant music of a hand-organ, which had been dragged out from its hibernation, wheezing and struggling through its old tunes, a little more asthmatic, perhaps, because of added age;

the sharp, clear tinkle of the bells upon the ragman's cart, and the dismal toot of a fish-horn. Who has not in some fashion so unconsciously associated these sounds with a morning in early spring, that any one of them may suddenly flash upon the mind's retina—the picture of blue skies, and air flooded with the subtle fragrance of the breath of the baby spring?

An old refuse-wagon jogged slowly up the street, half laden with its unsavory burden, drawn wearily and perfunctorily by a tired animal whose architectural proportions were but scantily hidden by a moth-eaten hide stretched tightly over it. He had no pretensions to flesh, and in sooth, as one watched his head sway sorrowfully with the labor it cost him to carry what little he had, it would scarcely have been a kindness to wish him more.

So closely are the spiritual and sanitary conditions interwoven in this life, where body and soul must live together in inter-dependence, that the old refuse-wagon, blot as it might seem upon the beauty of the morning, had its part in the general cosmogony.

The driver was a study in gray. His long boots were so liberally streaked with dust and ashes that it seemed an open question whether they had not originally been gray, with deeper shadings of black here and there. His clothes were of that indescribable mellowness of tint that passes under the generic term of dirty, to the careless observer. At the same time, to one with an artistic eye there was something harmonious and pleasing in the shaded neutrality of the garments, which could only have reached their present con-

dition by long and very hard wear, by close and tenacious contact with innumerable ash-barrels, by exposure to the sun and storm alike, and possibly by an insensible lending of their fiber to the soiled clod of humanity they covered. The slouch-hat which covered his retreating forehead and matted hair had yielded itself hopelessly to its condition in life, as being a slight intervention between the shock of gray hair and the swill-cans which emerged into light from shaded areas, borne upon the flat, ill-formed head. A phrenologist would have discovered that the organs of spirituality, morality, religion, refinement, and sympathy were totally lacking; but the swill-cans and ash-barrels were innocent of complicity in this, for, turning back the pages of his life for generation after generation, they had

always been lacking, and one could scarcely blame him for being merely an ill-conditioned brute, when he had been shackled into that miserable estate by the fetters of heredity.

The most that a sanguine lover of mankind could hope would be that he might possibly be capable of education as far as appreciation of the simplest moralities of life. Every inch of his body, as he sat slouched forward upon the wagon-seat, told of a sluggish, hard, coarse-grained organization. Not an outline from his head to his feet spoke of the man, but only of the brute. Yet what an injustice to liken the most debased of our humankind to brutes, since they, not having the perilous possibility of choice between good and evil in their power, are perfect brutes, each having risen to the full measure of brutish capability.

Yet in one sense this man might be reckoned a success. Nay, more. To a person who cherishes one of those exquisitely frail, marvelously tenacious conceptions called theories, he might even be a delight, since he lent a robustness, a strong vertebral support, to the theory that a man's employment, the groove in which his thoughts must run for the greatest part of his time, will exert an influence upon his character, and even mold his lineaments.

Studying that sullen, brutal, low-browed face, with dim eyes, that were like dusty windows, through which no glimmer of a soul could shine, you might readily believe that the subtle beauty, the indescribable suggestiveness of that glorious April morning, dew-washed, fresh from the hand of God, meant to him nothing but an oppor-

tunity to gather together in an ill-savored mess all the refuse and garbage that he could find.

Many a man has followed this calling, and has yet been a clean, white-souled man, who could let himself be insensibly influenced rather by the cleanliness he left behind him than by the refuse he carried away; but looking into Gustave Liebmann's face, you knew that it was the refuse which made his atmosphere, and which to him was the sole end and aim of existence.

Yet it is not for the sake of the sorrowful animal nodding his weary way up the street, nor for his master's sake, that I have brought this April morning to focus upon the creaky old wagon; it is because that beside the driver sat a little child, whose heart throbbed responsively, though vague-

ly, in sympathy with the throbbings of nature's heart, and to whom all unconsciously that morning was bringing something that was new and wonderful and marvelously sweet.

Such a very little child she was, although six times the blossom storms of May had swept the bridal veils from the fruit-trees since the fetters of life had been bound upon her. The tiny shrunken limbs might have belonged to a mere baby, and there was a pitiful curve in the little back that told of her lost birthright, the robbery by some one of the inalienable heritage of health and strength that should have been born with her.

But the face was not the face of a baby. There was no rounded contour, with dimples that come and go in the very wantonness of soft curves, the wild-rose tint of

babyhood, nor the fascinatingly indeterminate features that have not yet fairly emerged into decision from the rounded face. It was that most pitiful of all sights —the face of a little child grown old through suffering, that looked out through the frame of the faded blue hood. A wistful, tender little face withal, that might have been very fair to look upon if health had kissed the pale cheeks into roundness and rosiness, and happiness had curved the little drooping mouth into a smile. The brown eyes were as bright as if the child's luminous soul shone out through them, as radiant as when it first found a lodging in the frail casket of clay, and the little wave of hair that dropped across her forehead and fell over her shoulders in a carelessly twisted braid was so fair that it looked in the sun like spun

silver. A faded cloak of blue was gathered about her, and the little skirt of dull red made the only spot of vivid color about the child.

But she was happy just now. A ride with Granther was a rare treat, and one not to be held in light esteem; and it was because she was so overwhelmingly delighted that she shrank into a speechless, immovable little figure, half fearing all the time that by some outburst of speech or sudden gesture she might recall herself to old Gustave's thoughts, and he might end this revel by taking her home before he had finished his rounds.

That Granther did not like her, that she lived in an atmosphere of reproach for having presumed to be at all, she knew in her childish, not wholly comprehended way; and as children accustom themselves to

whatever falls to their lot, she had borne the harshness, the intolerance, with the same uncomplaining patience with which she had borne the touch of pain which rested so heavily upon the wasted little figure. Where a man, with fully developed reasoning faculties, might have cursed God and died, in the bitterness of a lot so set about with cruel limitations and blasted with disease, this little child had taken all as it came, without a question or thought that it might be different.

Even when, in her rare rides, she had seen other children frolicking in the very exuberance of their overflowing life, or rushing tumultuously upon their mothers for caresses of which she in her little life had never known one, she did not wonder why one should have everything, while from another everything should be with-

held. It was all right, and only to be expected. Those were other children, and she was herself. A crude philosophy, truly, but one which kept her submissive and even happy in the negative way of not being more unhappy than she had to be when her back hurt her more than usual, or a push or blow brought her general misery to a sharper focus for a time.

This child represented to old Gustave the one great wrong of his life, which had stung him out of stolidity into the fury of an enraged beast, and had made a scar which could not cicatrize and be forgotten while this little face looked at him.

CHAPTER II.

THE standard of ethics was not very high in the little row of tumble-down shanties called, in a curious commingling of truth and fancifulness, Sodom, but it did reach up, by some instinct rather than through any teaching, to a certain height of morality.

Gustave and his wife had one child, a daughter, who in her early girlhood had a certain immature comeliness that was not altogether without a charm in the eyes of the Sodomites. If Gustave knew what it was to feel so generous an emotion as a liking for any creature under the sun, he cherished this feeling for his daughter.

For his "woman" he had none but the feeling that she shared with his lean old horses, which one after another succumbed after a few months of drudgery. She was necessary. He could not do without her, and she ranked higher than the beasts in that she wore better, and after twenty-five years of rough usage was still able to bear his blows and do his work.

We do the lower orders of our fellow-beings an injustice, sometimes, when we think that they cannot share any of our emotions. When the news spread along the row of shanties that "Liebmann's girl had run off with an organ-grinder," not the most highly cultured among us, my sisters, could have been aroused to a greater enthusiasm of interest, nor gossiped about the matter with more uncharitableness and bitter judgment, than

did these unlettered, uncultured women of Sodom.

To know how old Gustave would "take it" was the focalization of interest; and to do him justice, he did not disappoint his neighbors in their desire for a little excitement. He vented his passion in a prolonged spree that became a date in the neighborhood from which to reckon events, even in this place where the calendar was apt to be reckoned by crimes of greater or less blackness. He killed his horse, and would have doubtless killed his wife, had she not fled until her "man was right again."

When, some months later, the hapless girl, deserted, betrayed, outcast, knowing nothing of God's tenderness, and, alas! too much of man's judgment, crept home in the blackness of her despair, as a

wounded animal drags itself toward its covert to die, with a helpless, wailing infant in her arms, old Gustave lifted his arm, and, with a curse, smote her so cruel a blow that she reeled out again into the night, the voice of the storm drowning her sobbing cry for help, and the blow rending the last hope she had hugged to her heart of finding a shelter upon earth.

Before the snow had covered her completely as she lay prostrate beside the door, a neighbor found her and carried her home to her own house, showing perhaps a larger charity than one would expect to find in one unskilled in Christian ethics, since, although she cared for the sinner, she in no wise condoned the sin.

Up to the last hour of the life that ebbed away at dawn she talked with bitter virulence of the disgrace the girl had

brought upon her family, but it fell upon the dull ears like the beating of the storm against the window. It could not enter and chill into greater desolation the broken heart.

When she was buried old Gustave paid for her funeral expenses, with a kind of fierce pride that made him more willing to do this for the daughter he had disowned and turned out to die than to let her be buried as a pauper, and the feeble baby was taken into his house. How it had lived at all was one of those marvels of the possibilities of vitality that defy explanation. Surely no little life ever came into the world under more sorrowful conditions. The misery of the girl-mother, that had grown in intensity and force as the months went by and she saw no escape from the issue that she shrank from in an agony

of shame and fear, had inwrought itself into the very tissue of the child's being. Every hygienic condition was unfavorable. Malnutrition clutched the baby frame in a vise-like grasp and twisted it out of shape. Blows that one would have thought might have killed a woman fell upon the tender baby flesh until the brutal hand of the grandfather had been legally stayed, and he had been bound over to keep the peace through the intervention of a neighbor more kindly disposed than the rest.

It would have been but natural if the grandmother had felt more tenderly toward the child, and that a remnant of the natural affection she must have had for the daughter who once lay upon her breast would have aroused at least a little kindly feeling toward it; but she had grown too dull to feel any quickening of latent love

when the helpless little creature was laid in her arms, and she only disliked it passively, because it "makes my man ugly."

And yet the child lived, fighting against the death which seemed to overshadow it continually with a patient endurance that at least held its own if it gained nothing. But no patience, no sweet submissiveness, no bravely borne burden of suffering could soften the heart of old Gustave toward the little Lisbeth. She kept before him the memory of his daughter's deed, and the tempest of wrath that had made him a creature mad and bereft of reason for a time, and which had given his neighbors a chance to fling taunts at him for a shame which had never yet stepped across their thresholds.

And this innocent child, touched with the divine nature of the Child Christ,

which enfolds us all when we enter this world, but is torn from most of us when we leave our childhood behind us, was the seal set upon shame, suffering, and sin. Alas, the pity of it all!

CHAPTER III.

BUT to-day Lisbeth was happy. She basked in the sun, she delighted in the distant strains of a hand-organ, and she watched with a quiet interest the houses at which they stopped for ashes. There were modifications of her happiness for a few minutes sometimes, when the ashes were being emptied into the depths behind her, and the playful breezes wafted them about her in a cloud that was suffocating, and covered her with a gray dust that settled upon the folds of her little cloak, and made her cough and sneeze when she tried to brush it off. But she had a store of

philosophy, this little Lisbeth, which stood her in good stead. The ashes belonged to the rides, and if she would have one she must not complain of the other; so she gave no sign of discomfort.

At last they drove around to the rear of a house, where the windows were open, and Lisbeth could see a white-capped housemaid whisking her duster about through a parted drapery of lace which shut out much that her eager eyes would have liked to see. Then came a ripple of music. Some one had run swift fingers over the keys of a piano, and Lisbeth held her breath in delight. Then a voice arose, first in a preliminary and bewilderingly sweet roulade of notes, that might have been the spirit of the spring taking to itself a human voice, and then after this brief exercise beginning a joyful song. Sud-

denly it ceased, and a lady came to the window and glanced out. She was waiting for old Gustave to come up from the open cellar-way, and her eyes did not at first note the patient little figure, with its rapt face, looking at her admiringly.

There was some caution concerning care in the removal of the ashes that she wished to give him, but as Gustave toppled the barrel over into the wagon, and the suffocating cloud of ashes enveloped the child, she forgot everything else, and called hastily:

"Take that child down, quick! She will be smothered."

"She no hurt," said Gustave composedly, stepping back out of the way himself, and waiting for the ashes to settle; but in an instant the back door opened, and the astonished child was lifted down in the

lady's arms, and carried out of the cloud into a clearer atmosphere.

"You poor little mite, I should think those ashes would choke you;" and standing the child upon her feet, she shook out the little cloak, and with her handkerchief wiped the dust-stained face.

Something in the tiny, misshapen figure, the pallid face, the lack of rounded contour, tightened her heart-strings.

"Would you like to come in and see me a little while until your grandfather is ready to go?" she asked gently.

But Lisbeth did not answer; she was staring in open-eyed and incredulous wonder at the face leaning over her.

"Why don't you speak up?" growled old Gustave; and the shrinking of the childish form, as the harsh voice fell upon her ears, told its own sad story to the heart

whose doors were always flung wide open at the touch of little hands.

"I am sure she would like to stay. Suppose you leave her till you come down the street again. You will be back in an hour."

Gustave gave a sullen grunt of assent. It went sorely against his grain to give the child this pleasure, but business was business, and he had often received some extra gratuity here at holiday season. He could see that it should never happen again, however, and so he drove away, leaving Lisbeth standing beside the lady, wondering in her bewildered little brain if she could be dreaming.

Sometimes she had dreamed beautiful things, and once she had thought that some one was holding her as she had seen mothers, even in Sodom, hold their chil-

dren. She was an imaginative child. The calm, phlegmatic temperament of her mother's race had not entered into her composition, but whatever the twisted strands of heredity had let down within her grasp of delight in beauty, in music, and love had come to her from generations of her ancestors beneath Italy's sunny skies.

For a brief space after the old wagon had rumbled creakily and complainingly out of the gate the two stood there, bathed in the glory of that quivering sunshine: the little shrunken figure, in mute content, beside the lady, who looked down upon her with a great wave of loving pity sweeping over her.

The wistful look in those brown eyes had made for little Lisbeth a royal highway into her heart. Child-eyes of that

same hue had once looked into her own with that expression of patient endurance, of innocent appeal; and for the sake of that memory, which abode with her continually and was more real to her than the material things in her life, which could be touched and handled, every little child became precious to her. The lowliest service that she could render to one of these little ones was a sacred and rarely sweet ministry, doubly sacred since it was not only rendered for the sake of the Holy Child, but for the sake of the one who had interpreted to her the holiness, the divine passion of motherhood, and who in awakening that passion had stirred its depths so that it should never slumber again.

It was almost ten years now since she had dropped tears and kisses upon those closed eyes, and yet it might have been

but yesterday that the fair curls had been pillowed upon her bosom, and she had watched death's angel kiss the tired baby face into peace.

Since then the motherliness in her nature, which had been concentrated upon the one little delicate child, had turned toward all child-nature, and no child-eyes ever looked into her own without meeting warm sympathy in their joys and sorrows alike; and if, as it sometimes chanced, a little one came in her way who stood in the shadow of neglect or pain, her longing to bring a ray of sunshine into that little life was almost passionate in its intensity. Her own child, cradled in the arms of the Christ, was blessed beyond all human conception; all that was left to her was to minister to other little ones in the name of her own motherhood, and for the sake of

the sweet blossom of childhood that had faded in her clasp.

Therefore it was no mere surface impulse of kindliness which prompted her to detain this sad-faced little child, that she might perhaps bring a light into those wistful eyes, or coax a smile to the lips that, with their patient little droop, looked as if they were wholly unaccustomed to joy. Not one whit happier was bewildered little Lisbeth than was this new friend who stooped and gathered her in strong and loving arms, saying brightly:

"And now we will have a nice time together, will we not?"

It was so light a weight, that tiny body, but barely sufficient to clasp the brave, sweet soul, and Lisbeth quivered with delight as for the first time in her life she felt herself in an embrace. Upstairs the

lady went with her burden to her own room, the housemaid whom they passed upon the stairs looking in no wise surprised, for all who lived in that house knew that childhood was the open sesame to the heart of the mistress.

She sat down in a low chair, and unfastening the child's hood, dropped it upon the floor beside her, and threw off the faded cloak. The hair of spun silver quivered into a halo about the little head for a moment, through a sudden mist of tears, but the voice did not falter that talked cheerily to the child, who even yet was too shy to speak. The little red frock was strained tightly across the crooked back, and with gentle touch the lady loosened it, and then nestled the child up to her so closely that the fair head lay upon her shoulder. A sudden thought came to her.

"What shall we do?" she asked. "Would you like to hear a story?"

Lisbeth gave a little bird-like note of assent. It was scarcely a word, more like a shattered bit of a syllable, but it was enough; and gently swaying to and fro, the lady told her the old nursery tale of Cinderella, watching the brown eyes widen and sparkle, and the faint glow of color come in the pale cheeks.

"And now we shall play that you are a little Aschenbrodel," she concluded, taking the German rendering of the name, in a passing fancy. "See, we shall have a little feast together, you and I, and I have a pretty frock that will make you like a little princess, and we will play that when your grandfather comes back with the wagon that the hour of twelve has struck."

Lisbeth laughed aloud. It was the first

laugh of her sad life, but she was too full of the quaint fancy to heed anything else just then.

Across the work-basket that stood in a corner of the room was a little pink-and-white flannel wrapper, finished about the neck and sleeves with soft lace and dainty stitching, and fastened with ribbon bows. It had just been completed, and was to have been sent to the little cot in the children's ward in the hospital, for whose little occupant Mrs. Drayton cared in every way that she might. But she could make another. Just now she wanted but this one thing to fill this veritable little Aschenbrodel's cup to overflowing with happiness; so, slipping off the old red frock, she put in its place the dainty garment, and fastened its soft, loose folds about the little figure. Then, rising, she put the child gently in a

"NOW, LITTLE PRINCESS, YOU SHALL SEE YOURSELF."—PAGE 35.

chair, and unfastening the fair hair, brushed it out until it fell in a stream of pale glory about the twisted shoulders, and drew it back from the little shining face with a knot of pink ribbon. Then she smiled down into Lisbeth's face.

"Now, little princess, you shall see yourself," she said; and lifting her again in her arms, she carried her into another room, and put her down before a long mirror, into which the child gazed, half frightened, wholly bewildered.

Who was this before her? This little figure with the soft folds of pink and white falling to the floor so loosely that they hid the shrunken limbs, the misshapen form; with a glory of pale gold falling about the happy face, the brown eyes looking wonderingly back at the little Aschenbrodel, whom a fairy's wand had turned into a

princess. She hardly understood that it was a mirror, and turned aside shyly.

"See, dear, you must not be afraid. It is yourself that you are looking at;" and lifting the little one in her arms, and drawing the fair head with its soft, floating hair again upon her shoulder, she stood before the mirror, and coaxed the shy child to look up.

The child's eyes strayed to a large picture that hung upon the wall near the mirror.

"Please tell me about that," said Lisbeth shyly; and standing before the picture, unwearied by the weight of the light form, Mrs. Drayton told the child as simply as she could that the angel was taking the little one to heaven, where it would be forever free from all pain, and tears, and disappointment forever.

"What is heaven?" asked Lisbeth.

Ah, what *is* heaven? Who shall answer, or put within the grasp of human conception the infinite effulgence of glory of that City of which the Lamb is the light thereof? Yet in simple fashion, with such similes as the child could grasp, the question was answered.

"And are you an angel?" asked Lisbeth.

"No, my child, no," was the hasty answer. "I am no angel."

"But this is like heaven, for see my beautiful dress," said the child, gathering up the soft folds in one tiny hand, and holding it up. "And it is so beautiful here, and I heard you singing, and I could never, never cry, if my back should be oh, so bad. If I should go to heaven, could Granther take me back?"

"No, darling, you shall stay there forever and ever," was the answer. "And this dress will soil, little Aschenbrodel, and you will have to put it off, but the robes are always spotless there. I cannot tell you quite how beautiful it is there, my little one, but I can tell you this, that there is no place in all the wide world as beautiful, nor anywhere is there as kind a friend as the messenger that comes to take us there."

A hot tear splashed on the child's face, and the brown eyes looked up in startled sadness.

"Do not mind, dear," and a kiss comforted the quivering lips. "We will not be sad. You shall be a gay little princess till the clock strikes twelve, and we hear the grandfather's cart coming back down the street; and yet you shall be happier

than Aschenbrodel was, for you need not leave your little frock behind you, but wear it home, and be happy in it. Now we will have a little feast, and the next time your grandfather brings you to see me we will have more stories and feasts."

The simple little lunch was but scarcely finished when the creaky old wagon groaned itself through the gate, and the panting horse came to a standstill before the kitchen door, looking as if the power of inertia would be strong enough to resist any propulsory suggestions that might be offered by the stocky whip which Gustave always carried.

Mrs. Drayton expected to see the child plead to stay, but Lisbeth meekly tied on the old hood, and put the faded blue cloak over her pretty wrapper.

"I want you to bring this little girl

again, Gustave," said Mrs. Drayton, as she put the child up on the seat, and smiled good-by into the luminous brown eyes. " Once a week at least you must leave her here for a little while."

Gustave grunted, a non-committal grunt that might be either assent or refusal, as any one chose to read it, and Mrs. Drayton, interpreting it as assent, watched the old wagon go away, and smiled at the fancy that the little Aschenbrodel, sitting in mute and blissful content upon the old ash-cart, should indeed have times of being a little princess, and entering an enchanted land of love and tenderness.

When the last glimpse of the little figure had disappeared, she turned and went up to her room, and knelt before the picture of a beautiful baby face, crowned with a halo of palest gold, as fair as the hair that

had but just now rested against her heart, but with a little more of heaven's glitter touching it into glory. Tender brown eyes, with a patient, wondering expression, looked into her own, as they had looked so often before, and the lips were parted, as if a little fluttering cry for mother was to escape them again.

She leaned forward and laid her cheek against the lifeless canvas, and in her heart there swelled the grateful prayer:

"I thank Thee, O my God. I thank Thee that Thou didst take her into tenderer keeping than mine, and that, all unworthy as I am, Thou dost let me minister to another little child for her sake."

If you had asked her the greatest blessing for which she gave thanks day by day, and if she had from her very heart-depths responded to you, the mother-love,

which could renounce unselfishly rather than hold where she could not save from an intolerable thralldom of weariness and pain, would have told you that day and night she thanked God that her child walked with Him in the Heavenly Gardens; and yet tears, hot and swift, were too often the lenses through which this blessing glittered.

But this glad April morning had brought a brief healing to her sore heart, for the little wasted hands she had clasped in her own like fluttering birds had brought comfort in their touch, and in making little Aschenbrodel happy she had made for herself a little season of joy.

CHAPTER IV.

It is the unexpected that always happens. Three or four times during the following week Mrs. Drayton laid aside trifles that she thought would please shy little Aschenbrodel when she should come again, and she looked forward to seeing her with genuine eagerness, determining to find out more about the child's home-life, and see whether perhaps something might not be done to make her more comfortable and give her better care than she seemed to receive. But when the day came that brought surly old Gustave along on his route, she watched for him all the

morning in vain, and having an engagement in the afternoon, went out, leaving word that if the child came she was to wait for her return.

The old wagon had nothing of sweetness or charm about it that day when at last it came, drawn by another lean beast, who had taken the place of the poor drudge who had laid his weary bones down for the last time in the interval.

Gustave had refused to bring the child, and had threatened her angrily when she had so far forgotten her usual submissiveness as to plead with tears that she might be taken.

The brutal word he called her did not stain the pure child-soul, for she understood it not; but she did understand that she could not again be a happy little princess—she must sit among her ashes, with

only the remembrance of that bright hour to hold to her heart.

When Mrs. Drayton came home and learned that Gustave had not brought the child, remembering the surly face, she determined to go and see the little one for herself, and not let her drift away again out of her knowledge.

The following day a telegram called her away from home, and she did not return for over a week, the Saturday morning preceding Easter Day.

That day was one which came to her laden with memories of exultant anguish. It was the anniversary of the day upon which she had seen her child triumphantly enter upon the glory of heaven, and upon which her heart had been rent asunder with the agony of parting. For hours the husband and wife sat alone together with

closed doors in the room from which the messenger of death had borne the beloved child, and no hand dare unveil the sacredness of such communion with grief.

At five o'clock Mrs. Drayton came down the stairs, dressed in white, her arms laden with flowers, and their perfume making an atmosphere of fragrance about her. A carriage waited at the door to take her to the hospital, where she went every year at this hour, and going into the children's ward, went from cot to cot, filling wasted little hands with rare bloom, and then singing glad Easter songs to them until the bedtime hour.

She had reached the foot of the steps, when a woman with a shawl thrown over her head came up, and half hesitated, as if she meant to speak to her, and then turned away.

"What is it? Did you wish to speak to me?" asked Mrs. Drayton.

"Well, I did, ma'am, but it don't make no difference, as long as you're going somewhere. Another time will likely do as well. It was only about little Lisbeth. Are you the lady that took her into the house, and told her stories and sang to her?"

"Yes. What of her?" was the hasty question.

"Well, she had a bad hurt getting knocked down by the ash-wagon, and I guess she ain't got no chance to be better. She keeps crying for you, and her folks said they wouldn't tell you, so I thought —I thought—" and she hesitated, shamefacedly. "Well, I know she ain't nothing but a crooked little young one, but I'm the kind that can't bear to see no one die

without getting their last wish, and her mother died in my house, so I thought I would come and tell you, for maybe you would come if you knew."

"Of course I will go. I will go at once. Come into the carriage and tell the driver where to go."

And the woman marveled greatly as she obeyed. A child, understand you, was but the least of all worthless possessions among the dwellers in Sodom. If a mother had a lurking inclination to fondness, she repressed it, as showing her folly, and poor little Lisbeth, with her ailing, weak, crooked body, had been despised, as not having even the elements of future value which to a certain extent made other children worth caring for.

Polly Matthews, who had rather marveled at her own weakness in gratifying

the desire of such an insignificant little creature, could in no wise enter into the eagerness with which this lady made haste to go to the little Lisbeth.

It was not a long journey with the swift-footed horses, and within fifteen minutes the carriage stopped before the miserable shanty, and Mrs. Drayton knocked at the door. She shuddered as she looked about her, to think of the atmosphere in which this little child had lived, growing like a lily from a bed of mire, pure only because it reaches up toward heaven's sunlight to blossom, instead of putting forth its leaves among the creatures that crawl in the slimy mud.

"Come," said old Gustave; and she opened the door, and stood upon the threshold. The old couple were eating their evening meal, and they looked up,

open-mouthed, at the vision in the doorway.

"I have come to see Lisbeth," she said. "Where is she?"

"She upstairs," answered the woman, without offering to rise from her seat to show the way, not from deliberate intention of uncivility, but because she knew no better. "You do no good. The doctor say she die quick. Good ting, dat."

Up the narrow stairs Mrs. Drayton went, clasping her flowers unconsciously in her hands. Low moans guided her into the little room where the child lay alone, her eyes closed, her face drawn with pain, and her little hands clutching a pink ribbon bow.

Just then, through the dusty window under the eaves the western blaze of dy-

ing glory made its way, and lighted up the dull corner of the dirty room.

"Little Aschenbrodel," said the tender voice, "I have come to you." The brown eyes opened, and looked with a bewildered gaze of incredulous wonder upon the white-robed, fragrant figure beside the bed.

"It is the angel," she said feebly.

"No, dear child," and Mrs. Drayton knelt beside the child, and leaned over her, that she might see her face. "It is not the angel just yet, but I have come to stay with you till he comes."

That it would not be long she could not doubt.

The brown eyes lighted up, and the little arms were stretched out appealingly.

"Shall I hold you?"

"Yes—like—like the day I was a princess."

The strong, loving arms gathered her up from the miserable cot, and the waning glory of sunset touched the brown head, leaning Madonna-wise over the fair one, with a halo of radiance. The impulse of divine motherhood, which should stir in the heart of every woman, was clasping the dying child.

CHAPTER V.

By and by Polly Matthews crept up the stairs, and Mrs. Drayton bade her return with the waiting coachman and bring her own physician, and take a message to her husband. That the angel of death stood so near that she could feel his chill breath she did not question, but the pitiful moans wrung her heart, and the child must be made more comfortable.

In less than an hour all her wishes had been accomplished. Her own physician had come, and done what skill might do to ease the pain that was so soon to be ended, and the tiny frame was resting easily in the loving arms, while a contented

look of fulfilled desire glorified the little face that had been so drawn with suffering.

"You won't go away?" whispered the child feebly.

"No, dear. I will stay and hold you in my arms till the beautiful angel comes, and then I will give you to him, for he is going to take you to heaven. Think of it, darling, to heaven!"

"And my back won't hurt any more," murmured the pallid lips. "And there will be singing, and it will be beautiful, like your house, only Granther can't bring me back any more."

"Yes, dear, like my house, only far more beautiful."

We who are wise in earth's lore can but measure the glories of the Celestial City by the beauty of the precious things we have seen and handled; and thus this

"YOU WON'T GO AWAY?" WHISPERED THE CHILD, FEEBLY.—PAGE 54.

earthly home was the child's highest conception of a heaven which should be all happiness.

These was a wistful look in the brown eyes.

"What is it, darling? Do you want something?"

"Will you sing now, please? It is so long to wait."

And then—I say it in all reverence—I think surely heaven began for little Aschenbrodel, even while the spirit was struggling to free itself from the grasp of that frail, suffering body, for all that her childish mind could conceive of delight and rapture became hers. She was cradled in tender arms; she breathed the perfume of the scattered flowers, and a paradise of joy became hers when the sweet voice sang softly to her.

By and by a step came softly up the stairs, and Mrs. Drayton's husband stood beside her. He had marveled at first at his wife's message, but when he looked into the pallid face cradled upon her arm, and saw the brown eyes growing clearer and clearer as the dawn of heaven's glory came nearer, he understood it all.

Yet could she bear it?

And it was just ten years ago that night that those two, husband and wife, had sat alone together, and watched the immortal shake off mortality and wing itself away.

"Is it not too much, dearest?" he asked gently.

"It *is* too much," she answered, lifting a rapt face. "I am not worthy of this blessing, that it should be mine to put this little unloved child into the Saviour's arms as tenderly as I did our own; but since it

has come to me, the pain is swallowed up in the glory of it. I must stay till the end. I have promised it."

And so they sat there, the clear, sweet voice never faltering in its rippling music, only pausing now and then for an instant to rest.

Old Gustave and his wife slept heavily below as the hours wore away. The dying child was nothing to them, and in their dull way they marveled at the folly of those strangers who were caring for her. That a pearl of surpassing value, a child's soul, had been committed to their keeping, had never dawned upon their swinish natures; and not having known its worth, they knew not its loss.

The night was very quiet that was to herald in the Easter dawn. The stars came out, and looked in through the open

casement upon the little group—the husband and wife, the dying child, and the invisible presence of one who seemed like a tender and familiar friend, so gentle had his coming been when once before they had waited for him.

Still the sweet voice shattered the silence into broken crystals of music, singing on, as once before it had sung a little soul away. Not the great waves of agonizing memory which rushed over her could drown the marvelous joy of the thought that for the sake of that fair child she could minister to this little unloved waif, and thus what might have been unendurably hard ot a heart so filled with longing love, became possible to her.

The brown eyes looked up into her face with quiet content, and the little hands rested in her own, as if they had always

found a home there. Little Aschenbrodel was content. What more could heaven mean than this rare joy?

But as the gray dawn lightened up the black edges of the night, and the Easter morning sent shafts of radiance athwart the eastern sky, the waiting messenger stooped over the tiny form. The dawn of heaven's morning was breaking for that brave, childish soul, who had borne earth-fetters so patiently, and had been content with so little of what we cherish here.

As his shadow fell across the white face and the brown eyes looked beyond earth, the first ray of the new dawn made a path of radiance across the room, falling across the empty cot, the little group, and dancing upon the opposite wall like a glittering pathway upon which the passing spirit might ascend to the Sun of Righteousness.

The singer's voice faltered, but the entreaty in the eyes, which returned for a brief instant to rest upon earthly things, bade her sing on, till the last notes should fall unheeded upon the ears that would soon hear the hosannas of the ransomed hosts.

"Christ the Lord is risen to-day,
Alleluia."

It had been upon the wings of that triumphant anthem that the white baby soul of her own child had fled from earth.

"Christ the Lord is risen to-day,
Alleluia!
Sons of men and angels say,
Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high,
Alleluia!
Sing ye, heaven and earth, reply,
Alleluia!"

A flutter of the little hands, a sigh so gentle that it was but the passing of a

breath, and the messenger was so close that the warm human clasp could feel his touch.

"Love's redeeming work is done,
Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the victory won,
Alleluia!"

But the sound of that last Alleluia was blent in the child's ears with the voice of many waters, and the voice of a great thunder, and as the released soul sprang upward toward its home, it heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps, and they sung as it were a new song before the Throne, the song of the Lamb:

"Great and marvelous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints. Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy Name? for Thou only art Holy."

The glorious Easter sunshine flooded the room, and rested like a benediction upon the face that had bloomed into such perfect peace when death had touched it. And in the great chorus of the redeemed, rising night and day before the Throne, there was a new strain; for the little child of whom earth was not worthy, since she was fashioned in the likeness of the Child Christ, and had been endowed with love and purity, even while sin and shame had laid hold upon her, had escaped from her prison-house, and, washed in the blood of the Lamb, was arrayed in shining robes that she should put off no more forever.

The watchers sat in silence for a time. The hour was too holy for speech, but at last, touching the lips with a farewell kiss, sealing them with love's last token, the one to whom had been given the joy of minis-

tering to this little child broke the silence with triumphant voice:

"Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

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